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Surrealism and (un)Happy Families: *Banalité* (1930)

Hazel Donkin

Abstract

This article deals with the subject of Surrealism and the family. The French Surrealists, led by André Breton, challenged conventional views on love and sought to explode restraints on sexuality in the inter-war period in both their personal lives and in their art. The movement maintained a consistent moral opposition to the institution of the bourgeois family. How was this expressed in photographic works? In the following article, this question is examined in relation to the illustrated book *Banalité*, written by Léon-Paul Fargue, and illustrated by Roger Parry and Fabien Loris.

In Paris after World War One those who had been radicalised recognised that although a level of sexual liberalisation was evident, the fact that the family remained the nucleus of society and woman's role was still fundamentally domestic meant that women's oppression was concrete. The fact that the Surrealists insistently challenged repressive conventions proved irresistible to both male and female artists and indeed the sustained campaign that the movement conducted against the institution of the family ensured that, in terms of sexual politics, the group were perceived as radical in the inter war period as well as after World War Two.¹ Opposition to the family was not confined to manifestos, tracts, resolutions, activities and gestures but was also made plastic. This paper explores the manifest hostility to the institution of the bourgeois family in the book illustrations of Roger Parry in *Banalité*, Léon-Paul Fargue's poetic re-writing of his childhood.

In the First Manifesto of Surrealism (1924), André Breton described the French writer Léon-Paul Fargue as "surrealist in atmosphere".² In *A Wave of Dreams*

(1924) Louis Aragon listed him as one of the “Presidents of the Republic of Dreams”.³ Fargue’s work was published by Breton in both *Littérature* and *Minotaure*.⁴ He was heavily influenced by Surrealism as well as Symbolism, his imagery is strange and unsettling and he believed that the poetic image is a return to, a re-writing of, childhood, an unlocking of the most intimate passages in time.⁵ The book *Banalité* presents Paris as a site of the marvellous and the narrator is a male child. *Banalité* consists of poems and prose based on nostalgic recollections of Fargue’s childhood and adolescence, and was initially published, without illustrations, in 1922 by Gallimard’s *Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française* and republished in a new edition in 1928. Soon afterwards Gallimard announced the publication of an edition illustrated with photographs. Roger Parry, also an associate of the Surrealists, had ambitions not to illustrate the book but rather to create a series of photographs to accompany this book that had touched him personally; his friendship with André Malraux (at that time art director at Gallimard) and his contacts at *NRF* facilitated his *Banalité* project.⁶ Parry’s attraction to Fargue’s work is understandable, the author was arguably at the height of his success at this time and his work is a sensitive description of life which makes use of popular language and is filled with abundant imagery. *Banalité* brought Parry immediate critical acclaim in France and abroad. Julien Levy bought Parry’s photographs from *Banalité* as well as two prints subsequently published in *Photographie Modernes* and exhibited them in two shows *Surréalisme* and *Modern European Photography* in early 1932.⁷

In 1930 *Banalité* was published as a limited edition with 16 black and white photogravures, credited to Parry and Fabien Loris. Loris was an artist, actor and musician, and a close friend of Parry who would collaborate with him in future projects in Africa and Tahiti in the early 1930s. The photographs in *Banalité* include straight prints, photomontages, super-impressions, negative reversals and five photograms produced using paper cut outs provided by Loris. Each photograph is printed on a full page and although they relate to an aspect of Fargue's text they are visual interpretations rather than illustrations. Parry's work was influenced by Maurice Tabard, another associate of the Surrealists, Parry's apprenticeship under him at Deberny and Peignot had acquainted the young photographer with the full spectrum of modernist experimentation. Tabard had exhibited in Stuttgart at *Film und Foto* (1929) and had returned with a gift for Parry of Roh and Tschichold's *Foto-Auge* (1929) which included Moholy-Nagy's 'Peinture Photographie Film' as well as Werner Gräff's seminal anthology of New Vision photography *Es Kommt der neue Fotograf* (1929) and Hans Richter's book on avant garde film illustrated with stills *Filmgegner von heute – filmfreunde von morgen* (1929). Parry had already acquired for himself Renger-Patzsch's *Die Welt ist Schön* (1928).⁸

Parry's work demonstrates a range of photographic techniques but he shared Tabard's interest in still life and a tendency to produce darkly lit, theatrical compositions. Parry developed a distinctive modernist style, influenced by cinematic *mise-en-scène* and his work is generally characterised as surrealist because it is enigmatic and deals in the subjects and iconography of visual

surrealism. In *Banalité* Parry was clearly influenced by the developments in experimental photography, Maurice Cloche's *Alphabet* as well as Breton's use of text and photography in *Nadja* (1928) were obvious points of reference but Parry was influenced more generally by Surrealism's exploration of the interface between dream and reality. In Parry's commercial work and in his personal work Parry developed a careful *mise-en-scène* where objects function as signs.

Although the production of illustrated books flourished in the inter-war period, it was not until the late 1930s that the widespread use of photographs began to challenge the dominance of drawings. In the 1920s books which were illustrated with photographs were rare and the Surrealists were pioneers in this area; in 1922 *Champs délicieux*, inspired by Breton and Soupault's *Les champs Magnétiques* (1920) was published in a limited edition of forty copies with a preface by Tzara. *Champs délicieux* included twelve gelatin silver prints of photograms, printed by Man Ray from negatives made by re-photographing the twelve original images. Christian Bouqueret believes this publication to be nothing less than the origin of a new type of work, the prototype of a genre which would blossom at the end of the decade.⁹

The illustrated book provided photographers, in collaboration with writers, an opportunity to combine both art and illustration and further explore the potential of the relationship between text and image.¹⁰ Although Breton's comments towards the end of *Nadja* suggest that he considered the photographs (mostly provided by Jacques-André Boiffard) in his novel to be unsatisfactory, his

meaning is ambiguous. “La partie illustrée de *Nadja* fût très insuffisante” he said and, given that the photographs that he cites were retained in the revised edition of 1963, one could assume that he meant, at least partly, that he would have liked there to be more, indeed he expressed regrets about the absence of particular images.¹¹ In 1928 Breton declared “And when will all the books that are worth anything stop being illustrated with drawings and appear only with photographs”; artists associated with Surrealism rose to the challenge and the book became a site for carefully crafted experimentation.¹² Illustrated books published in the inter-war period by artists and writers aligned to Surrealism included a number of titles which developed the cohesion of text and photographic image. Surrealist books that brought together writers and photographic artists include: Péret, Aragon and Man Ray, *1929* (1929); Claude Cahun, *Aveux nos Avenues* (1930); Léon-Paul Fargue and Roger Parry *Banalité*; René Crevel and Max Ernst, *Mr Knife Miss Fork*; Paul Eluard and Man Ray, *Facile* (1935); Hans Bellmer, *La Poupée* (1936); Georges Hugnet, *Le Septième Face du Dé* (1936); Camille Bryen and Raoul Ubac (credited as Raoul Michelet), *Actuation Poétique* (1935); Bryen and Ubac (credited as Ubac Michelet), *L’Aventure des Objets* (1937); Cahun and Lisa Deharme, *Le Coeur de Pic* (1937); Man Ray, *La Photographie n’est pas l’art* (1937); Hugnet and Bellmer, *Oeillades ciselées en branche* (1939) and Bellmer and Eluard, *Jeux vagues de la poupée* (1939). It is notable that the majority of these titles deal in sexuality, *Facile* is a simple *homage* to ‘woman’, *1929* is Surrealist pornography, Bellmer’s work explores vulnerability and cruelty and Hugnet subverts mass media images in his free and violent photomontages. *Mr Knife*

and Miss Fork celebrates love while lambasting the institution of the bourgeois family. *Banalité* reveals the family to be both a 'haven in a heartless world' and a prison. Photography was an ideal medium to promote a surrealist 'love revolution' because it was (and is) widely used to disseminate ideas and norms about sexuality and is therefore ripe for subversion.

World War 1 had accelerated social and cultural changes that had characterised the early years of the twentieth century. Gender distinctions were disrupted as bourgeois women entered the workforce in large numbers and working-class women were increasingly employed outside the domestic realm in the rapidly growing tertiary sector. Many of the rights that women enjoyed during the war were lost once it ended, but there was a general belief that profound changes regarding sexuality were taking place in French society. The reality may have been that woman's role remained fundamentally domestic but there was also an aspiration for freedom and a revaluation of sexuality.¹³ The fact that women could be independent led to endless debates about the implications of 'modern woman' and demands for a return to traditional gender relationships. This tension between progression and repression was evident in every area of French life from politics, medicine and psychoanalysis to art and popular culture. Romy Golan characterised the inter war years in France as a period of increasing political, economic, and cultural retrenchment where the conservative ethos of the *rappel à l'ordre* (call to order) functioned as a backlash against women, urging a return to the pre-war status quo and a re-establishment of 'family values'.¹⁴ France lost 1.3 million men in the war and

post-war demographic concerns reinforced the identification of peace and restabilisation with women's traditional maternal roles. The state launched an aggressive pro-natalist campaign, creating the *Conseil Supérieur de la Natalité* in 1919 and propaganda events such as the *Exposition nationale de la maternité et de l'enfance* in the Bois de Boulogne in 1921.¹⁵ In 1920 a draconian birth control and abortion law was passed by an overwhelming majority of 521 to 55, outlawing all information pertaining to birth control and abortion. In 1923 anti-abortion laws were further strengthened, with four-year sentences for abortionists and six months for women undergoing an abortion. The leftist coalition, the *Cartel des Gauches*, voted into power in 1924, did nothing to abrogate these laws, the 'politics of motherhood' that identified family and maternity with the good of the nation dominated nearly all political factions.¹⁶ In Paris the Surrealists declared war on the family, as well as the Church and the State. Amy Lyford has outlined how the Surrealists 'sought to destabilize the gender roles that had cemented traditional ideas about the family, one of the key institutional building blocks of French national identity'.¹⁷ She notes that they were in a minority as many artists and writers reconsidered their practices as they looked for ways to participate in rebuilding post war culture by answering the call to order.

Banalité is exemplary in its exploration of inner consciousness at the same time as projecting ideas about love and marriage into the external world. The images contribute to the notion of the family as a sinister, tense and violent site. Parry was interested in the relationship between fantasy and reality; both image

and text in the book exemplify the understanding of the resolution of dream and reality as the source of poetic imagination. But Parry's attraction to Surrealism was also based on radical politics; Parry was born in 1905 into a working class family in the 18th arrondissement, Paris. He was inspired by the Russian Revolution in 1917 and throughout the 1920s he was associated with anarchists and communists. Loris described himself and Parry as "what you could call cheerful bohemians; passing whole evenings putting the world to rights, discussing politics and conjuring up projects that would never see the light of day."¹⁸ A central aspect of *Banalité* is a critique of the bourgeois family. This is not to say that Parry saw the project as political, or that the book itself is political but rather that it engages art philosophically with an area which is part of everyone's human experience and which constituted a live contemporary debate.

The title of *Banalité* suggests trivia but it is also a concept that has strong positive and negative connotations and Fargue invested it with a powerful emotional charge. Fargue's exploration of the implications of an ordinary view of the extraordinary, and an extraordinary understanding of the world of the ordinary is arguably indebted to Mallarmé's concept of the ordinary. Fargue had been Mallarmé's student. Fargue's readers are made aware both of the strangeness of Parisian society as seen by the child narrator, and of its ordinariness in the same way that in Mallarmé's prose and poems:

...the world of the ordinary is defined not as a one dimensional and absolute reality, but as a perception dependent on standpoint and a willingness to engage imaginatively with what could be described as different and other.¹⁹

Fargue's carefully crafted child narrator is powerful; the reader is captivated by the immediacy of the boy's narration. Tim Love notes that children have advantages as observers, they see things from fresh perspectives and their vocabulary is not restricted by convention and social mores. They may not understand exactly what is happening, whereas readers are likely to. The difference between the child narrator's and the reader's understanding can be exploited for comic or for serious effect. The reader forgives a child narrator for raising uncomfortable truths. Charles Lambert uses a child narrator to exploit their clear-sightedness and innocence. "Whether they're protagonists or witnesses, they tend to be one step behind - or to one side of - the attentive adult reader, which sets up an interesting narrative gap through which the unsettling elements can squeeze", he said, while Elizabeth Baines maintains that "children can have instinctual knowledge which we adults can lose, and these insights yet gaps can be the stuff of dramatic conflict and motor a story."²⁰ Child narrators are common in Surrealism due to its concern with 'primitivism', with a return to origins. In *Banalité* there is a dialogue between the text and image in the book, Parry's images often suggest a child viewer, they show life as perceived by the narrator, including his simple pleasures and dark memories and fantasies. The images, however, are not conventional realist representations of the boy's recollections, they are not interpretations of reality; the range of techniques create what Rosalind Krauss calls a 'kind of cleavage in reality'; these are constructions that make it clear that we are not looking at reality, instead the viewer encounters a complex array of signs.²¹ The series of images in *Banalité* function to open doors in the viewer's mind to associations

and memory, particularly childhood memories. According to Breton who believed that childhood came closest to one's "real life", these memories are the most fertile as they emanate a sentiment of being unintegrated, and then later of having gone astray.²² Parry's images express something about self-discovery, about retrieved experiences and nostalgia, and about psychoanalysis and its concern with childhood. Parry carefully positions himself, and the viewer, in the liminal spaces inhabited by the child.



Fig.1: Roger Parry, Untitled (Figure) from *Banalité*, 1930. Image courtesy of Nicolas Callaway.

Plate 12 in *Banalité* [Fig.1] relates to the text which describes Fargue's adventures at the Landelle residence which he visited regularly as a boy. The large apartment on Rue Montaigne was located on the fifth floor and featured an immense balcony which ran around the whole house and from which one could look down upon five streets. Fargue tells of how he would look down at the cars and the mysterious silhouettes of passers-by with his group of friends and, excited by the recent and well publicised murders in Paris (by Gamahut and Marchandon), would predict catastrophes and wish for something terrible to happen.²³ In fact two years later, two houses along from the Landelle house, one of the most notorious murders in 19th century France took place when Henri Pranzini killed a prostitute named Madame Regnault, along with her maid and twelve year old daughter. Parry's photomontage using a paper cut out of a figure alludes to this as the bearded figure holds a large butcher's cleaver, Pranzini's murder weapon.

The image is a photomontage made using a paper cut out, a form located within the domain of memory by Man Ray and called 'objects of dreams' by Ribemont-Dessaigues, a form where the 'ghosts of objects attain psychological status'.²⁴ The image is 'doubled', the shadow and particularly the two sets of feet render it unstable, it encapsulates a transitional or 'threshold' space, what Benjamin called a 'revolving door'; it is charged with memory but open enough to facilitate the viewer to also, in imagination, move forward to what will or could happen.²⁵ For Krauss 'doubling' creates a fracture or what she calls 'an experience of fission' as "the double destroys the pure singularity of the first [...] through

duplication it opens the original to the effect of [...] multiplies burgeoning within the same.”²⁶ What seemed to interest Parry in Fargue’s text was how the extraordinary and the uncanny were related to the everyday, the domestic, the familiar. Parry’s image attempts to reconcile these opposing terms as it alludes to actual passers-by below the Landelle residence, the boy’s interpretation of them as well as murderous villains, both real and imagined. The starkness and generality of Parry’s images facilitate an intimacy with the memories and imaginings within the narrative which could not be achieved by text alone. Both Fargue’s text and Parry’s images are intense and they correspond closely. However, while the text marries an exuberance and appetite for life with melancholy, Parry’s plastic interpretations focus on the strangeness and violence of these memories and place them outside of reality.

Two photographs are presented before any text appears in the book and function as epigraphs which establish the fact that the images are not representations of actual objects but are figments of imagination. The first is the most abstract image in *Banalité*, a photogram made using cut out paper shapes, [Fig.2]. It is akin to an illustration in a children’s picture book but it is a complex image which is highly evocative and open, containing references to familiar objects rich in associations. To make the personal nature of their work clear, Surrealist artists often created individual personas based on animals or birds. The white cut out shape suggests a bird, perhaps a pigeon, perched upon a brick wall, facing a clear and expansive night sky with eyes closed. There is a sense of freedom, the whiteness suggests purity and innocence. In the text

Fargue expresses the exploratory energy of youth as well as the need for stability. The bird is grounded but has the ability to fly freely before returning home; the narrator in the text was loved and well cared for but melancholy, and could escape to the realm of dreams and imagination. The image introduces an element of mystery.



Fig.2: Roger Parry, Untitled (Bird) from *Banalité*, 1930. Image courtesy of Nicolas Callaway.

The relationship between reality and dream is further emphasised in the graphically manipulated third plate, positioned before the long prose which dominates the book. The lower half of the image shows a pair of eyes and the upper section is filled with floating paper boats, [Fig.3]. The eyes do not look directly at the viewer but are dreamy with unidentifiable images reflected on the pupils.



Fig.3: Roger Parry, Untitled (Eyes) from *Banalité*, 1930. Image courtesy of Nicolas Callaway.

In *Banalité* Fargue inhabited an internal zone where reality merged with imagination. Parry's photographs are depopulated apart from several ghostly figures and a hand belonging to a dead body. However, the images are vibrant, echoing the vitality of Fargue's narration and unifying text and image. The fact that the images are mostly free from human presence gives them a generality, Fargue's reminiscences are autobiographical and emotional but Parry's photographs counter this and address a common experience of family life and youth in which darkness and cruelty are present both in reality and in imagination. The text is peppered with extreme violence, explicit and implicit, as the narrator develops an awareness of brutality in everyday life and recalls vividly imagined dangers. This is accompanied by joy and comfort, whereas the photographs highlight themes of sadness, tension and violence.

Plate 5 in the book [Fig.4] alludes to the suicide of the narrator's young friend, Albert. The text describes a tentative friendship with this boy who was an 'outsider'. Fargue was often invited to Albert's house for dinner and was impressed by the affluence of the family and their homely abode but especially by the attractiveness of his friend's mother. The boys eventually lost touch and Albert's death was reported to Fargue some years later by Albert's cousin who told of how he had shot himself in the mouth. The family, he said, had no idea that anything was wrong until they found his body on the landing. In the text, however, there are indications of discord; the mother is, by her own admission 'nervous' and Albert says at one point "Me, I need someone to pull me out of the shit." Fargue tells of how he was always keen to see Albert's collection of

framed and mounted insects but was disappointed because although they were housed in an impressive cabinet far superior to his own, they were 'not in a good state'. Fargue describes insects with broken antennas and legs and 'the top part of their mouth worn away'. He describes little piles of yellow dust on the velvet beneath the abdomens which indicated that the insects had been eaten away by parasites.



Fig.4: Roger Parry, Untitled (Man and gun) from *Banalité*, 1930. Image courtesy of Nicolas Callaway.

Parry's severely cropped photograph echoes this sense of decay and disintegration. The gun and hand are the focus of the image but the flooring is central and is lit to emphasise texture and a significant amount of dust. Apart from a head and upturned hand the body is unseen and the debris evokes the powdery particles to which something is eventually reduced to by death. Parry's focus on materiality is in contrast to Fargue's treatment of the death which is simply reported in a brief quotation of the cousin's news, after which the narrator's thoughts turn immediately to the boy's mother. It is up to the viewer to imagine what lies beyond the cropped frame of the image but the text, in conjunction with the photograph, prompts contemplation of Albert's forlorn existence and his inability to find solace in a materially wealthy but emotionally dysfunctional bourgeois family. A critique of the bourgeois family runs through this work and the photographic images contribute to the notion that this institution, relatively new at this point, was poisonous rather than noble.²⁷ Fargue was deeply wounded by his personal family experience, he was born outside marriage in 1876 to a seamstress, his father was an engineer whose family refused to accept the liaison and although his parents created a family unit, Fargue senior did not legally accept his son until 1892, and did not marry until 1907. Fargue loved his parents intensely and was devastated by his father's early death in 1909 but a sense of melancholy pervades his works that deal with the family. Fargue's childhood was melancholic, he said:

I know very well, that all children suffer with intensity; but I believe truly that I went farther, deeper, than anyone else in this direction. I wandered unseen, that way, along avenues that led nowhere, through interminable ravines, in reveries marked by trepidations secret and abundant as the sea²⁸

His book *Vulturne*, published by Gallimard in 1928, is also pertinent:

There was a family. Its life, its gay moments. Its child [...] The window open to the sun [...] Friends at their table, happy, at the coffee hour. Their return from work. The time of their toilette with their almond Soap [...] Their voices in the rooms, calling each other, their poor eyes, their humble gestures. They walked gently alongside life, in the sadness and the shame and the joy [...] All of that, dead!!²⁹

Plate 6 [Fig.5] in *Banalité* refers to the interest that Fargue's father had in chemistry. The illustration is placed after a passage which reveals the unhappy family life of Fargue's father and his brother, Fargue's uncle, who received no money and 'more kicks than caresses' from their parents. A story is recounted of an occasion when the two boys were taken to the *Champs-Élysées* by Fargue's grandfather who stood on the kerb and pointed to the passing carriages saying "That's what I could have had, if I hadn't had you."³⁰ Fargue tells of his surprise when finding out from his mother about his late father's intense love of chemistry and that he kept a laboratory, as he had only known him as a sad, sombre man and when 'all hope was already lost'. Parry's photograph evokes lost hope; the 'spirit of research' and 'inventiveness' of Fargue's father when young seems to be mourned here. Whereas the narrator's friend, Albert, had been unable to establish a place for himself in society, his father had relinquished the life he could have led because something else was expected of him and he was unable to resist the pressure to be a breadwinner, a provider for his family, such was its strength. Parry's psychological expressiveness conveys a profound sorrow, a sense of loss in relation to the narrator's father but also in relation to creativity. The fingers of the discarded gloves, a common surrealist symbol, uncanny in their lifelessness, are echoed in the scorch marks on the table, thus dominating the

foreground of the image. The two central measuring jugs, with their spouts aligned seem expectant but the crystallised liquid on the bottle behind them suggests abandonment. This play of presence and absence is evident throughout Parry's illustrations; the use of symbols, the photographic medium itself as indexical and specific forms such as photograms and negative reversals all denote a psychological terrain.



Fig.5: Roger Parry, Untitled (Chemistry) from *Banalité*, 1930. Image courtesy of Nicolas Callaway.

The tensions created by family life and the responsibilities of motherhood in particular are expressed in two further episodes interpreted by Parry. Plate 11 shows a static, deserted carousel horse, Fargue recalls how the children imagined themselves as soldiers and a tells of a competition in which they had to hook rings onto lances as they rode, prizes were given to the most successful and to children who had shown bravery or managed to spear a particularly difficult ring. The attendant mothers also battled as their sense of injustice was fuelled by competitiveness on behalf of their offspring, “Yes madame, that is cheating! He got a prize because he went on so many times! And that great big girl, there! Would you put kids of that age on a wooden horse? I ask you!”³¹ Protectiveness spills into physical violence a few pages later. Fargue recounts an incident at the park when a big boy planted a spade in a heap of sand and said “All the kids who knock this spade over will have their ears pulled!”³² Fargue was unable to resist temptation and at the moment when the boy attacked, Fargue’s mother was swiftly upon him. She slapped the boy with deliberate and shocking force. Parry’s photograph presents a mountainous pile of grainy sand with a bucket, a sand pie battlement already made and a territorial spade atop, [Fig.6]. The bucket is decorated with a picture of an animal which, although difficult to define, resembles a bear or a lion, a symbol of ferocity in the protection of kin. Ominous dark shadows above strengthen the sense of melancholy. The presence of absence is evident once again; there is no human figure and the sandcastle, although captured on film, has long gone. The edge of Parry’s backdrop seems to be visible on the right hand side of the photograph, this is clearly a studio shot, a carefully staged ambiguity. The

viewer is unsure as to what they are looking at. In this banal but carefully composed image mimesis is undone and the viewer is once again drawn towards the liminal space, the gap.

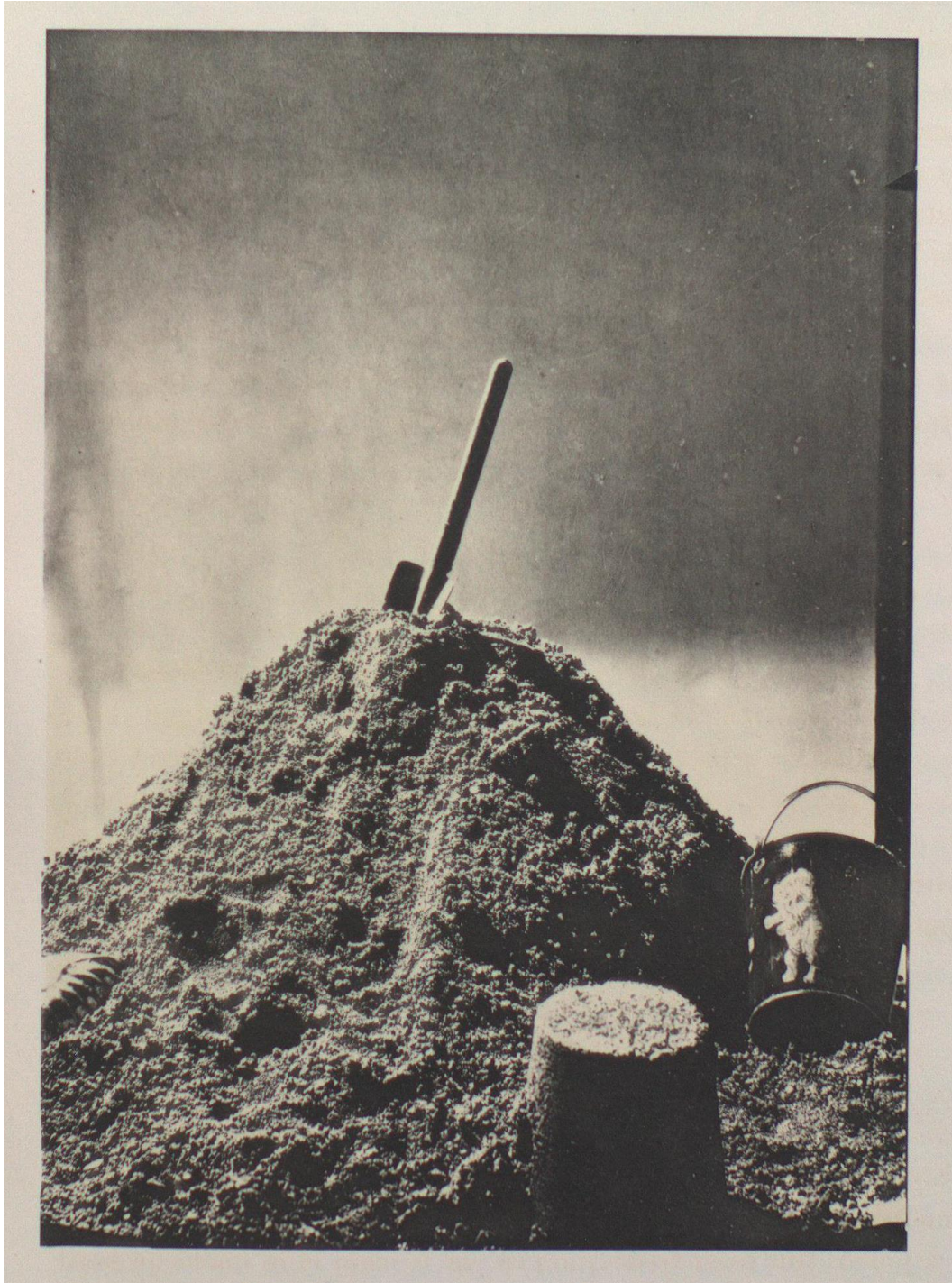


Fig.6: Roger Parry, Untitled (Sandcastle) from *Banalité*, 1930. Image courtesy of Nicolas Callaway.

Fargue communicated a desire for stability and tells of how he hated moving house and would be consumed with sorrow when he found out that the family was to leave an apartment. His response was to embrace the walls for long periods in the same way that his grief at losing a favourite housemaid '*la mère Jeanne*' was manifested in a physical attachment to her old clothes.³³ This short passage which ends the long prose finishes on a sombre note in which Fargue considers the final departure of death. Parry illustrates this passage in Plate 14 [Fig.7] with an image of an abandoned room. The lack of control felt by the narrator is echoed in the upturned photograph; this family has literally been turned upside down. The photograph also evokes finality. The space is claustrophobic despite the fact that the door is ajar, because the decoration in the hallway matches that of the room and therefore the opportunity to escape is somewhat limited. The panelling, the crossed pattern of the empty coat hooks and the shadows of the door frame on the wall contribute to this sense of entrapment. The rope lying on the floor lends the flavour of a crime scene.



Fig.7: Roger Parry, Untitled (House) from *Banalité*, 1930. Image courtesy of Nicolas Callaway.

The family may be a 'haven in a heartless world' but it can also be hellish and, as Freud noted, a potentially dangerous site where sexuality shifts around. Parry's photographs throughout the book evoke the notion of the family as a site of danger. *Banalité* appears to meet Breton's call, in the *First Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), for 'fairy tales for adults' as it is both touching and sordid at the same time.³⁴ In 1995 Annette Messenger expressed her admiration for the veracity of surrealist photography when she compared her own work to fairy tales:

And tender, like fairy tales where the ogre devours ten adorable little children. But everyday life is altogether much more cruel, surprising and tender. That's why I much prefer surrealist photography ... to surrealist painting, because it really is in touch with reality.³⁵

Banalité offered an artistic contribution to the discourse on the institution of the family in the early twentieth century. Fargue and Parry were not Surrealists yet produced a work which was essentially held together by the 'glue' of Surrealism. For Parry an important aspect of this adhesive was politics. A consistent polemic against the family was one of the aspects of Surrealism that proved attractive to some of the men and women who orientated towards the group and its legacy is evident in the work of artists such as Keinholz, Paula Rego, Annette Messenger and Paul McCarthy. Indeed, it is the totality of the surrealist vision which ensures a continued interest in the movement and although the ethical engagement of Breton's group was problematic and filled with contradictions it possessed a gravitas that seems commendable in these unsettled times when 'family values' are once again on the agenda.

Dr Hazel Donkin completed her postgraduate studies at Northumbria University in 2010 and now teaches History of Art at Durham University. Her research interest is in the field of Surrealism, particularly photography. She is currently the subject editor for the visual arts section of the Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism, due to be published online in 2014.

¹The relationship between female artists and writers and Surrealism is discussed thoroughly in S. Suleiman, 'Surrealist Black Humour: masculine/Feminine', *Papers of Surrealism*, Issue 1, 2003. Available to view at:

http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal1/acrobat_files/Suleiman.pdf;

Suleiman, *Risking Who One Is* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994); Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender Politics and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990); W. Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1995); Chadwick, *Surrealism and Self-Representation* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998).

² A. Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969): 27.

³ L. Aragon, (1924) *A Wave of Dreams*, trans. Susan de Muth, *Papers of Surrealism*, Issue 1, 2003: 8. Available to view at:

http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal1/acrobat_files/deMuth.pdf

⁴ *Littérature*, Issue 1 (1919) and *Minotaure*, Issue 6 (1935).

⁵ P.S. Thompson and P. Gizzi, *An English translation on Léon-Paul Fargue's "Poemes"* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003): <http://mellenpress.com/mellenpress.cfm?bookid=5458&pc=9>

⁶ C. Bouqueret, *La Nouvelle Vision photographique en France 1920 - 1940: Des Années folles aux années noires, 1920-1940* (Paris: Marval, 1997): 72.

⁷ Bouqueret and C. Bertoud, *Roger Parry. Le Météore Fabuleux* (Paris: Marval, 1995): 25.

⁸ These acquisitions are documented in Bouqueret and Bertaud: 18

⁹ Bouqueret, *La Nouvelle Vision photographique en France 1920 - 1940*: 146

¹⁰ The relationship between Surrealism and the illustrated book has been explored thoroughly by René Riese Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) and Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (New York: Granary Books, 2004).

¹¹ He used the word 'insufficient'. See A. Breton, *Nadja* (1929) (Paris: Gallimard, 1945): 199

¹² "Et quand donc tous les livres valables cesseront-ils d'être illustrés de dessins pour ne plus paraître qu'avec des photographies". Breton (1928) *Surrealism and Painting* (London: Macdonald, 1972): 32.

¹³ Mary Louise Roberts provides a useful overview of the effect of the war on women in *Civilisation without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France 1917 - 1927* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). See also Chapter One of Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer's *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2003) which outlines modern challenges to traditional notions of femininity in this period.

¹⁴ R. Golan, R. *Modernity and Nostalgia: art and politics in France between the wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

¹⁵ Ibid: 20.

¹⁶ R.D. Sonn, "Your body is yours": Anarchism, Birth Control, and Eugenics in Interwar France', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol.14, No. 4, 2005: 415-432.

¹⁷ A. Lyford, *Surrealist Masculinities: Gender anxiety and the Aesthetics of Post-World War 1 Reconstruction in France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007): 5.

¹⁸ Interview with Fabien Loris, 20 January 1981 (Author's translation), published in Bouqueret and Bertaud: 19.

¹⁹ Hélène Stafford, in her book *Mallarmé and the poetics of everyday life: a study of the concept of the ordinary in his verse and prose* (New York: Rodopi, 2000) argues that in Mallarmé's writing there is the powerful pull of the craving to escape ordinariness, but also a need to rejoin it and to explore its positive and negative potential.

²⁰ Charles Lambert was an O. Henry Prize winner in 2007. Elizabeth Baines won 3rd prize in the Raymond Carver Short Story Competition 2008. Both cited in Love, T., 'Child Narrators in

Adult Fiction'. <http://litrefsarticles.blogspot.co.uk/2011/01/child-narrators-in-adult-fiction.html>

²¹ R. Krauss (1985) 'The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism', *Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography from the 1850s to the Present*, ed. L. Heron and V. Williams (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996): 86

²² Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*: 40.

²³ *Banalité*: 60.

²⁴ Krauss: 83.

²⁵ Emma Cocker discusses the concepts of 'threshold space' and the 'revolving door' in relation to photographs and quotes Ian Walker who, in his book *City Gorged with Dreams* talks about the photograph as a 'scene of the crime', where something both has happened and will/could happen, allowing the viewer to in 'imagination move forward or backward.' See E. Cocker, 'Desiring to be led astray', *Papers of Surrealism*, Issue 6, Autumn 2007: 11 <http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal6/acrobat%20files/articles/cockerpdf.pdf>

²⁶ Krauss: 86.

²⁷ Mark Poster argues that the modern family arose among the bourgeoisie in the mid-18th century and emerged as the dominant family structure in the 20th century. See M. Poster, *Critical Theory of the Family* (London: Pluto Press, 1978).

²⁸ Fargue cited in A.A. Rhides, 'The Poetry of Léon-Paul Fargue', *French Review*, Vol.9, No.1, Nov. 1935: 26.

²⁹ These biographical details are taken from Katherine Knorr's review of Jean-Paul Goujon's biography *Leon-Paul Fargue* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998). The translation of *Vulturne* is also hers. See K. Knorr, Leon-Paul Fargue (Review) *New Criterion*, Vol.16, No.8, 1 April 1998: 71.

³⁰ L-P. Fargue, R. Parry and F. Loris, *Banalité* (Paris: Éditions de la Revue Francaise 1930): 3.

³¹ *Banalité*: 52.

³² *Banalité*: 55.

³³ S. A., Rhodes, 'The Poetry of Léon-Paul Fargue', *The French Review*. Vol.9, No.1, 1935: 33.

³⁴ Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*: 16

³⁵ Annette Messager, 'Interview with Robert Storr', *Faire Parade 1971 – 95*, (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne, 1995): 114.